

this is
about more
than who
we fuck

(and who fucks us).

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an INTRO

This zine was born out of one part desire for a writing project and one part desire for more writing to be out there about the place of personal relationships in the struggle (against authority, oppression, domination...). The things that destroy us aren't just the cops and the prisons, but the models of relationships that are implicit, taken for granted and sap us of our ability to imagine something different. These writings, in different ways, attempt to lay out some glimpses into fights against the things the writers were taught about sex, love and close relationships.

This zine isn't meant as an intro to anything. There's a lot out there that's billed as intro to non-monogamy, polyamory, free love, whatever you want to call things. If you're looking for stuff like that, some suggestions from us would include:

- Easton, Dossie and Janet W. Hardy. *The Ethical Slut: A Practical Guide to Polyamory, Open relationships & Other Adventures*
- Taormino, Tristan. *Opening Up: A Guide to Creating and Sustaining Open Relationships*
- Andrea Zanin's blog www.sexgeek.wordpress.com – check out Poly resources section
- Learning Good Consent – zine on building consent and communication into our sexual relationships
<http://zinelibrary.info/files/learning%20good%20consent2.pdf>.

Also you're welcome to email us thoughts, comments, suggestions etc.
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-The importance of critique both in support and safe(r) spaces, and in discussion of these concepts;

-The value, place, limitations, and problems of being non-judgmental;

-What it means to be an ally;

-and, How pushing people beyond their comfort zones can be an essential form of support.

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For Lovers and Fighters by Dean Spade (2006)
<http://makezine.enoughenough.org/newpoly2.html>

In the past five years or so, increasing numbers of people I know have started talking about and practicing polyamory. Queer and trans people in the communities I participate in have been spending more time discussing these ideas together and generating analysis about them. Many people still recite the common advice "that can't work," but as many of us live consistently with identities and practices that we've been told our whole lives cannot work, I see people consistently resisting the "common sense" of monogamy just as we resist the "common sense" we inherit about race, class, gender and sexuality in our culture.

I do not find it to be a stretch to see how interrogating the limits of monogamy fits into the queer, trans, feminist, anti-capitalist, anti-oppression politics that most of my personal and political practice focus on. When I think about this topic, I often start with feminism, where so many of my first political inquiries came up during my teens. I'm always heartened to think about the anti-romantic propaganda of the '70s feminist movement. Have you ever seen any of this? One piece that comes to mind is a poster—a photo of a man and a woman walking hand in hand through a park on a beautiful fall day with pies smashed on both their faces—with text saying something about killing the romance myth below them. I have several very pulpy flexible strong romantic bones in my body, but I've always been delighted by this anti-romance politics (especially in light of recent claims to heteronormative family structure and traditional symbols and ceremonies of heterosexual "love" by the gay marriage proponents).

It was a relief to me to find out in my teens that there were feminists waging a critique of romance. I saw how the

LINES OF DISCUSSION

-How safe(r) space needs to be taken back from the dominant culture, needs to be expanding in order to survive, and thus needs to involve attack against said culture, for only by conflict can we take/create space for ourselves;

-How supporting people has to be paired with fighting the systems and situations which have put them in this situation (e.g. capitalist alienation, police and prisons, heteropatriarchal rape culture);

-How attack/continuing to struggle is healthy and healing;

-How concepts like 'calming people down' and 'helping people get back to normal' as manifested in support are intensely ideological, and come from an ideology which is definitely not our own;

-How talking about safe(r) spaces and support means, implicitly, talking about eliminating, deconstructing, and destroying the things that make us unsafe, the things against whose personalized effects we struggle when we call on our support networks, and how this implication needs to be fleshed out. (Consider the police: we may enact 'no police' policies in our spaces, but unless we are willing to defend that with our bodies, our ferocious commitment, and our chosen implements, the police can still make their own choice to enter our spaces whenever they desire. Thus, more is needed.);

-How support has looked in certain historical moments where people were both struggling and suffering and how support engaged with both those elements for example, the Irish Republican H-Block prisoners in Long Kesh Prison in Belfast in the '70s and '80s;



depression, trauma, despair, etc. we have of engaging in this struggle, and that means pushing each other, which means orienting our relationships of support towards attack.

Attack is really draining and hard, as well as energizing and healing, and beautiful, and scary, etc., and so attack means support. Support, radical support anyway, means more than treating symptoms, it means going after the root causes, so support means attack.

DISCUSSION

-Notes on personal experience: personal experience is a very important way of knowing, and we don't want to exclude it. However, there are a couple dynamics that we find come up sometimes around the sharing of personal experience. They are 1) that some people become silenced because someone's personal experience gets interpreted as that person being an expert, or 2) that discussion ends because we want to respect each other, and so find it daunting or unappealing to critically engage with discussion points blended with – often very sensitive – personal histories. To this end, we think it's important to say:

-no one has to bare their credentials in order to share.

don't assume that anyone doesn't have certain

experiences just because they haven't shared them.

-we want to have a discussion, and we want it to be critical. while we expect everyone to be respectful, and will facilitate to this end, sharing your personal history as a point of discussion, shares it, and is based on the agreement that it is okay to critically engage with it.

myth of hetero monogamous romance lined up to fuck women over—to create a cultural incentive to enter the property arrangements of marriage, to place women in a subordinated position in the romantic dyad, to define women's worth solely in terms of success at finding and keeping a romance, to brainwash women into spending all their time measuring themselves against this norm and working to change their bodies, behaviors, and activities to meet the requirements of being attractive to men and suitable for romance. I see this myth as both personally damaging to people—in how it creates unrealistic expectations about ourselves and each other and causes us to constantly experience insecurity—and also politically damaging because it's a giant distraction from our resistance and it divides us (especially based on the fucked up self-fulfilling stereotypes about how women compete with each other). Sadly, although the usual tropes are focused around heterosexual romance, much of this gets carried into queer communities as well and surrounds our approaches to sex, love, and romance to varying degrees. It's important to have a critique of the myth of romance that looks at how damaging it is to us in our personal lives, and how it is designed to fuel social arrangements, codified in law, that were invented to subordinate women and make them the property of men.

I also think about this in terms of capitalism in the sense that capitalism is always pushing us toward perfection, creating ideas of the right way to be a man or a woman or a mother or a date or whatever that people cannot fulfill. The goal is that we'll constantly strive and buy things to fill this giant gap of insecurity that is created. You can never be too rich or too thin (greed) or rich enough or thin enough (insecurity). Capitalism is fundamentally invested in notions of scarcity, encouraging people to feel that we never have enough so that we will act out of greed and hoarding and focus on



accumulation. Indeed, the romance myth is focused on scarcity: There is only one person out there for you!!! You need to find someone to marry before you get too old!!!! The sexual exclusivity rule is focused on scarcity, too: Each person only has a certain amount of attention or attraction or love or interest, and if any of it goes to someone besides their partner their partner must lose out. We don't generally apply this rule to other relationships—we don't assume that having two kids means loving the first one less or not at all, or having more than one friend means being a bad or fake or less interested friend to our other friends. We apply this particular understanding of scarcity to romance and love, and most of us internalize that feeling of scarcity pretty deeply.

This gets to another central point for me. One of the things I see myself doing in thinking about this stuff is examining how lots of people I know are really awesome, but then show their worst side, their worst behavior, to the person they date. To that person, they will be overly needy or dependent, or dominating, or possessive, or jealous, or mean, or disrespectful, or thoughtless. I have seen that tendency in myself as well. It makes sense. So much insecurity surrounds the romance myth and the world of shame in which sexuality is couched in our culture, we can become our monstrous selves in those relationships. I also see people prioritizing romantic relationships over all else—ditching their friends, putting all their emotional eggs in one basket, and creating unhealthy dynamics with the people they date because of it. It becomes simultaneously the most important relationship, and the one where people act out their most insecure selves.

One of my goals in thinking about redefining the way we view relationships is to try to treat the people I date more like I treat my friends—try to be respectful and thoughtful and have boundaries and reasonable expectations—and to try to

carrying forward, the expansion of a struggle which we share, as opposed to a one-directional relationship in which there is one struggle, with one party engaging in struggle and another party playing “only” a supporting role.

-What do you mean by attack?

-conflict; the effort to destroy what destroys us, many ways this can be realized, definitely not only throwing molotovs at cops during a riot or some other absurdly limited, spectacular image. An orientation covering myriad specific activities.

-What about Safe(r) Space?

-This workshop is mostly about support, but safe(r) space has a better rhythm for the pun. We do think it's true in the sense of those spaces needing to be seized and conflictual and expansive and defended, because we won't be safe until these systems have all been dismantled, because they will never quit trying to destroy us. But we want to talk mostly about support.

-When we talk about support, we're talking about it in the context of close relationships of affinity, love, friendship.

HOW WE SEE IT... (elaborate)

Our lives are fucked up. This isn't random, individual, or isolated. It's the lived experience of hetero-patriarchy, white supremacy, gender rigidism, capitalism, rape culture, prison society, hierarchy, ecological degradation, and on and on.

We can't escape this world. We can't wait for its internal contradictions to collapse it deterministically. We have to destroy it (position of attack, permanent of conflictuality).

However, going up against these systems is scary. We need to support each other in fighting through the fear, anxiety,



This is the outline of a workshop by the same title (without the subtitle, which was added later) which was given in the Fall of 2010 in Montreal. It was heavily discussion based and thus, there isn't too much in the outline, but because the politics of personal relationships don't get touched on more broadly in the other selections, we thought it would be a good idea to include this outline.

SAFE(R) SPACE MEANS ATTACK (or creating strength and courage within emotionally vulnerable relationships)

by Maria and Dave

Description:

A discussion of intimate support which views close relationships as places from which to attack the world which destroys us. How do safe(r) spaces and support relate to a position that favours permanent conflict? Can support be the stoking of our rage, rather than calming us down? Given that this world wants us dead, or worse, what does a search for a safe space mean? Above all, this will be a discussion not a prescription.

INTRO

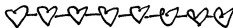
-Safe(r) Space Means Attack? What's that mean?

-It's a wordplay that makes us smile, based off the slogan, "Solidarity Means Attack".

-Solidarity Means Attack comes to us – maybe it has an earlier history – from solidarity with the Greek Rebellion of December 2008. It is a slogan representing more elaborate ideas about the nature of solidarity which have a much longer history. Briefly, it stands for the idea that solidarity is the

treat my friends more like my dates—to give them special attention, honor my commitments to them, be consistent, and invest deeply in our futures together. In the queer communities I'm in valuing friendship is a really big deal, often coming out of the fact that lots of us don't have family support, and build deep supportive structures with other queers. We are interested in resisting the heteronormative family structure in which people are expected to form a dyad, marry, have kids, and get all their needs met within that family structure. A lot of us see that as unhealthy, as a new technology of post-industrial late capitalism that is connected to alienating people from community and training them to think in terms of individuality, to value the smaller unit of the nuclear family rather than the extended family. Thus, questioning how the status and accompanying behavior norms are different for how we treat our friends versus our dates, and trying to bring those into balance, starts to support our work of creating chosen families and resisting the annihilation of community that capitalism seeks.

I think polyamory has become an increasingly important topic of discussion and analysis in trans communities that I am part of in recent years. In many ways, it makes sense that this would be an area of emergent resistant practices in communities resisting gender norms and breaking gender rules. In loosening our ties to the gender binary, our ideas about being proper men and women often loosen. As our previously strict ideas about our own genders fall away, often, at the same time, we become more experimental with gender and sexual orientation. So people who've always seen themselves in a very particular role, like, say, butch lesbian, and are now questioning that gender association and starting to disconnect biology from gender and think about gender expression more fluidly, might find themselves interested in sexual experimentation with people of different genders as well. I've



seen a lot of people who transitioned from lesbian identity to trans man or trans masculine identities wanting to experiment with fag identity, or to screw other trans people or non-trans men. A part of this is about beginning to feel new resistant threads of queer sex in new ways—seeing your body in new ways and feeling like you can do more things with it and then decide what those things mean to you. This is certainly not true for all trans people, but I have frequently seen it.

For people living on the outskirts of traditional gender, being perceived as different genders at different times and coming to find out how subjective gender assignment is, and how fleeting membership in any gender role can be, can generate new feelings of experimentation and increased independence and pleasure. Suddenly, this thing that has always been a given in our culture—that all people are male or female their whole lives, and that this difference is inscribed by ‘nature’ in our very genes— falls away when some people perceive you as a woman and others as a man, and when gender starts to come apart in pieces: hair, chest, clothing, walk, voice, gesture, etc. Even for trans people who eventually arrive at a stable male or female identity that fits certain traditional gender norms, many still have their image of gender’s stability strongly disrupted by the experience of changing gender and navigating the world from a new standpoint. Others, like myself, who continue to occupy a gender position that defies traditional expectations of either gender and, therefore, get interpreted many different ways for many different reasons constantly experience the instability of gender, and usually have a lot of funny and scary stories to tell about the fluidity of perception.

For some people sex is a place where gender roles get confirmed, and having sex with people and having them perceive you and treat you according to the gender roles you

I know now that whether I’m someone’s ‘primary’ or ‘non-primary’ partner, there are some basic things I need. For example, I could never be in a romantic relationship again in which I only see the person once every few weeks, without regular check-ins and caring acts in between hang-outs. Plus, for me to have worthwhile, exciting and safe (in the emotional sense) sex, I need to be having regular sexy times with my partner(s), so we can build good consent and communication, and try new things! I also need to feel that my partner is super excited about spending time with me and fucking me, and that these things aren’t extra burdens or stresses.

I’m at a place now where I know my needs pretty well, which was one of the hardest things to figure out. I’ve learned to communicate them, and ask other people what their needs and expectations are. I’ve learned that I can say “no” to relationships that demand more than I am willing or able to give, or that don’t give me what I need.

I think it’s important to constantly re-educate ourselves on these issues: so we can learn to be better in all our relationships, so we can be honest, non-jealous, and caring partners and friends, and so we can avoid, as best we can, people getting hurt, feeling pushed aside, feeling secondary.





do little things to show you care, like leave a note on my bike or something". But as little and basic as these things seem, they are so hard to ask for: you can't ask someone to be super excited about a relationship when they're not, or to give more energy and time, if they feel that the relationship is just not as much a priority as others.

After a long time, I realized that this person loved me, and cared about me deeply, but I was not someone she prioritized in her life, at least not in the way that I wanted and needed to be prioritized. We finally had a very honest conversation about this, and both came to the hard realization that we had different expectations towards each other, and different needs, and that this incompatibility made the relationship too painful to sustain in its current form.

I still think that having multiple sexual and/or romantic partners is do-able, and that I could be someone's "secondary" partner again, but I think this requires hard-core honesty about needs & expectations from the get-go, and really good communication. For example, I'd rather someone say "I like you, but can only see you once every two weeks, because that's how much I'm willing and able to give to this relationship" than "I'd love to hang out more but I'm just really busy", which evades responsibility and isn't clear about expectations. Plus, everyone is busy, so you make time for people you prioritize and want to see.

I also think that people need to be very careful about how they treat their "secondary" partners, and any lover, friend, roommate or family for that matter: these are *not* people you can just call up whenever you're lonely (unless that's your arrangement), and ditch whenever life gets to be too much.

are expressing can be a really wonderful and affirming feeling. When I was first coming out as trans, it meant the world to me to be able to explore my gender by having sex with people who wanted to engage in gender play and who respectfully saw me as I saw myself. For people who are experimenting with gender how they think about or express their own gender, wanting to have different kinds of sex with different kinds of people can be a significant part of that learning process.

In the communities I'm in, this has resulted in lots of interesting discussions. For couples where one person is beginning to identify as trans, it can mean recognizing that the two members of the couple can have sexual orientation identifications that don't necessarily depend on the gender of the other partner—like a couple where the non-trans woman identifies as a lesbian and a femme and her trans boyfriend identifies as a fag. For some people, too, this has encouraged them to open their relationships so that both members can get the experimentation they want, allowing them to keep being together in ways that work for them and that they really love.

For other people I know, who don't have a primary partner, polyamory means getting to be pervy and dirty with all the people who appeal to them without having to be judged or considered a player or a liar. For people socialized as female, this can be incredibly important. We are raised to think that sexual pleasure is not for us, that to seek out pleasure is to be a slut, that we should be less sexual than men, that sex is a service you give to attain commitment and family structure from men. Moving past that, owning sexual pleasure and being allowed to seek it out is a radical act for everyone in our shameful culture, but particularly for people raised as women who are told to be sexy (for others to consume) but not pleasure-seeking. Radical pro-sex feminists carved out these ideas in the 1980s, and I see that echoed in the desire of the



communities I'm in to embrace sexual freedom and experimentation.

This issue of experimentation and different kinds of affirmation that come from sex also gets to our politics about identity. Shitty liberal culture tells us to be blind to differences amongst people, and stupid romance myths tell us love is blind.

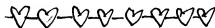
But for folks who have radical politics, and recognize that identity is a major vector of privilege and oppression, we know that love and sex and culture are not blind to difference, but rather that difference play a major role in sex and romance and family structure. We also understand that experiencing and acknowledging the identities we live in and are perceived in is important, and finding community with other people who are like us can be empowering and healing. For that reason, a lot of us may want to experiment in those ways, too. For instance, we may be in a relationship we are super into, but then want to have an experience outside that relationship with someone who shares a characteristic with us that our partner doesn't, whether that be race, language, age, class background, ability, trans identity, or something else. Our radical politics tell us we don't have to pretend that those things don't matter, and that we can honor the different connections we get to have with people based on shared or different identities. If we love our partners and friends, it makes sense that we would want them to have experiences that are affirming or important for them in those ways, and not let rules of sexual exclusivity make us into barriers for each other's personal development.

A lot of the things I'm writing here go to the basic notion of what we think loving other people is about. Is it about possessing them, finding security in them, having all our needs met by them, being able to treat them in any way and still having them stick around? I hope not. What I hope that love is—whether platonic, romantic, familial, or communal—is the sincere wish that another

different ways. Because we have to. There are only 24 hours in a day, 7 days in a week, etc., so we need to choose who we are going to make time for in a major way, and how much energy and support we can put into different relationships. The amount of time we make for someone doesn't necessarily indicate how much we love & care about them. For example, I only see some of my best friends and closest family members a few times a year, but I love them so much! However, time commitments do indicate how we prioritize relationships, and that's ok. We just need to be really aware and honest about these things, and communicate them to our friends, family and lovers, which is fucking hard to do! And a lot of people aren't good at it, or don't have the practice or tools.... so people get hurt.

So, for the purpose of this story, I'm going to use the words "primary" and "secondary"/ "non-primary" partners to signify romantic/sexual partners who are prioritized differently, but I encourage folks to think critically about these terms.

In this recent relationship I was in, I was not only a "secondary" partner, but I also *felt* secondary, in the sense of pushed aside, taken for granted, neglected. I saw this person once every few weeks. When we hung out, it was often nice, sometimes hard, but I found the time in between our hang-outs was fucking painful, filled with anxiety & doubt. I wanted to see her more often and for her to put more energy into our relationship, but I also didn't want to burden her or ask her to feel something she just didn't. When I finally did bring these anxieties up, the pressure she felt was so bad it made our hang-outs stressful and unpleasant. Still, I found myself wanting to ask for basic things – like, "could you call me once in a while and just check to see that I'm alive and ok", or "could you



Some thoughts on being /feeling 'secondary'

Learning to be polyamorous, for me, has been a lot about *re-education*: shifting the ways I think about love, sex and relationships, and unlearning certain ideas that have been taught to me all my life. Ideas like, “there’s only one soul-mate out there for you” or “you can only *really* love one person” or “if your partner is dating other people, it’s because there is something wrong with you, or your relationship, or they don’t love you enough”, or “if you sleep with more than one person, you’re a slut (and that’s bad) and you’re unable to commit”, etc had to be seriously challenged.

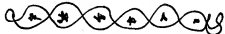
But even once I was able to break down these myths in my mind, and understand that most of us already love and care for tons of people in our lives, that all these count as *real* relationships, which require time, energy and support, and that there’s nothing wrong with being a slut, I still felt like there was so much learning to be done. Mainly, I find myself constantly thinking about and gaining new understandings of how to be a more loving, respectful and supportive partner or friend, while also taking care of myself (which can be so fucking hard to do sometimes).

I learned a whole lot about these things during a recent romantic relationship I had. I learned even more after it ended. Without ever explicitly using these labels, I would say that I was a “secondary” partner to this person, who was dating other folks, one of whom was her “primary” partner. A lot of folks don’t like terms such as “primary” or “secondary”, because it hierarchizes people and relationships in an awful way that seems to say “I care about person X more than person Y”, which is often just not true. Although we may fight to break down hierarchies of relationships, we do prioritize people in

person have what they need to be whole and develop themselves to their best capacity for joy or whatever fulfillment they’re seeking.

As a jealous person, I’m interested in building love and trust with people that does not hinge on sexual exclusivity, because part of my jealousy, and maybe part of the jealousy implied in the cultural drama repeatedly portrayed on TV of “The Other Woman,” “The Affair” and the heart-crushing trust-violating meaning placed on sex outside a relationship, is that desire always exceeds any container—and we all know that from experiencing our own desire. No matter how much we love and want and adore and are hot for our partners, we also experience desire outside that dyad, and the myth of romance (one person out there for each of us, find them, love them, buy things with them and you’ll be happy forever), which we’re all drilled with from birth ’til death, makes this knowledge terribly threatening. So the point, for me, becomes recognizing that commitment and love and interest in someone else’s well being does not necessarily include a deadening of all sexual desire for other people, or trying to unlearn the belief that it does. The point for me is to create relationships based on deeper and more real notions of trust. So that love becomes defined not by sexual exclusivity, but by actual respect, concern, commitment to act with kind intentions, accountability for our actions, and a desire for mutual growth.

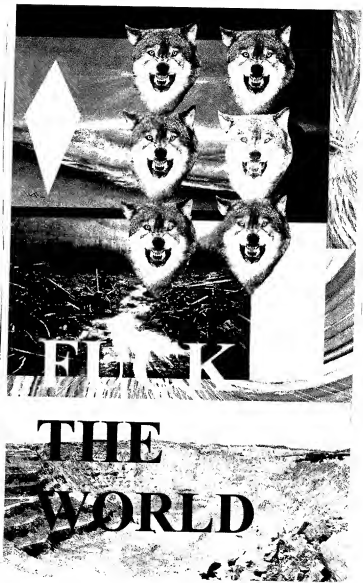
And yet, despite everything I’ve expressed here, I also have serious concerns about the push for polyamory amongst my friends. Sometimes I see it emerging as a new sexual norm, and a basis for judgment and coercion. In some circles I’m in, it has become the only “radical” way to be sexual. Those who partner monogamously, or who just don’t get it on a lot, are judged. I also see, perhaps more frequently, the poly norm causing people to harshly judge themselves when feelings of jealousy come up. Having any feelings at all, and especially



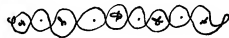
admitting them, is so discouraged in our culture. We are encouraged to be alienated from ourselves and others, cure ourselves of bad feelings through medication and “retail therapy,” and made to expect that perfection and total happiness are the norm while anything other than that is some kind of personal failure or chemical imbalance. This results in a lot of repressed feelings. Many people in the communities I’m in, especially people who have lived through sexual violence and people raised as women in our rape culture, have a hard enough time identifying for ourselves what is okay with us when it comes to sex—what we want, what is a violation, what our real feelings are—and feeling entitled to express them. We certainly don’t need more messages that tell us that our feelings related to sex and safety are wrong.

I’ve been disturbed to see dynamics emerge where people create the new poly norm and then hate themselves if they cannot live up to it. If they are not perfect at being non-jealous, non-threatened, and totally delighted by their partners’ exploits immediately then they have somehow failed. I have felt this way myself. Frustrated at how my intellect can embrace this approach to sex and yet my emotional reaction is sometimes enormous and undeniably negative. At times, this has become a new unachievable perfection I use to torture myself, embarrassed even to admit to friends how awful I feel when overcome by jealousy, and becoming increasingly distant from partners as I try to hide these shameful and overwhelming feelings.

This doesn’t seem like the radical and revolutionary practice I had hoped for. In fact, it feels all too familiar, like the other traumas of growing up under capitalism—alienation from myself and others, constant insecurity and distrust and fear, self-hatred and doubt and inadequacy. I do not have a resolution for this dilemma. I only have hopes, for myself and



by olivia d.



your weekends are my workweek and we never get to sleep in late and make fried potatoes and tofu scramble anymore, but i save some afternoons for you. crawl into your bed while you're hitting the snooze at 4pm on a sunday and wake you up. push my cold nose into your cheek and whisper that i'm making coffee and the potatoes are already frying.

i have enough love to go around. its not a commodity. i'll make you breakfast at 5pm on a sunday night and when you leave to go to work, i'll go out dancing and make out with someone i've been flirting with for weeks. and its not sneaky and behind your back. and its not taking anything away from how i am when i see you. i might not have a lot of time, but i have a lot of love for the people in my life and i'm willing to think hard about how i distribute my time. and i'm willing to say something when i need you to hold my hand, to have my back. and i trust that you'll do the same.

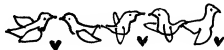
and if we ever get married, we'll know it's for immigration purposes. and if we go through periods of time where neither of us are sleeping with anyone else, we'll know it's not because we possess each other. and when we hit rocky patches and it's fucking hard and we're taking turns falling apart, we'll know that at least we've communicated enough in the past to probably deal with it. probably. because even though i'll never promise to love you forever, we've gotten pretty far and i don't have any intention at the moment to stop loving you. and that time qualifier doesn't make it less meaningful. it means that this is a decision i'm making over and over again, every time we schedule a hang out, i'm doing it cause i want to see you. cause i want to be there.

so when you look at me every once in awhile and say that you can't believe things turned out this way. i'll repeat, i can.

others, and lots of questions. How do I recognize the inadequacy of the romance myth while acknowledging its deep roots in my emotional life? How do I balance my intellectual understandings with my deep-seated emotional habits/expectations? It seems like the best answer to all of this is to move forward as we do in the rest of our activism, carefully and slowly, based on our clearest principles, with trust and a willingness to make mistakes. The difficulty of having open relationships should not be a reason not to try it, but it should be a reason not to create new punishing norms in our communities or in our own minds. We've done difficult things before. We struggle with internalized oppressions, we chose to live our lives in ways that our families often tell us are impossible, idealistic or dangerous, and we get joy from creatively resisting the limits of our culture and political system that are both external and part of our own minds.

One thing I have figured out for myself in the past few years is that this is a pretty slow process for me. Whenever I've tried to dive into polyamory with various partners fast, I've felt terrible and often ended up losing my ability to be with them because of how awful I've felt about my own jealousy. I hate the feeling of having a double standard and being a monster. So now I'm trying to figure out how to have relationships that are not based on sexual exclusivity, but also where I can be comfortable admitting what is going on for me and not pushing myself to be somewhere I'm not—going slow enough to figure out what works and what doesn't. It's not easy and it's still pretty mysterious to me.

Sometimes while I ride the subway I try to look at each person and imagine what they look like to someone who is totally in love with them. I think everyone has had someone look at them that way, whether it was a lover, or a parent, or a friend, whether they know it or not. It's a wonderful thing, to



look at someone to whom I would never be attracted and think about what looking at them feels like to someone who is devouring every part of their image, who has invisible strings that are connected to this person tied to every part of their body. I think this fun pastime is a way of cultivating compassion. It feels good to think about people that way, and to use that part of my mind that I think is traditionally reserved for a tiny portion of people I'll meet in my life to appreciate the general public. I wish I thought about people like this more often. I think it's the opposite of what our culture teaches us to do. We prefer to pick people apart to find their flaws. Cultivating these feelings of love or appreciation for random people, and even for people I don't like, makes me a more forgiving and appreciative person toward myself and people I love. Also, it's just a really excellent pastime.

I do not have a prescription for successful relationships, and I don't think anyone should. The goal of most of my work is to remove coercive mechanisms that force people to comply with heteronormative gender and family norms. People often get confused and think that me and other trans activists are trying to erase gender and make everyone be androgynous. In fact, that sounds a little boring to me. What I want to see is a world in which people do not have to be criminalized, or cast out of their family, or cut off welfare, or sexually harassed at school, or subjected to involuntary mental health care, or prevented from getting housing because they organize their gender, desire, or family structure in a way that offends a norm. I hope we can build that vision by practicing it in our own queer and activist communities and in our approaches to ourselves. Let's be gentle with ourselves and each other and fierce as we fight oppression.

it was april, but it was fucking snowing. we were biking from parc ex to your place and my brakes weren't working on my bike so we had to walk down hills which filled our shoes with slush. and then i got a flat so we had to walk the rest of the way anyway. and i think i made you pretty upset that night too. i was being silent. processing. trying not to explode at you before i had figured out exactly what i wanted to say.

i try not to hold people to things they don't want to do, but what you kept telling me was that you wanted us to spend the same amount of time together, but you wanted to also see a whole lot more people. when you asked someone else out, i wanted to interpret the act at face value - that you were asking someone else out, that it had nothing to do with me, that i had nothing to "worry" about, that all the bullshit lies that i'd been taught were coded into that act weren't true. but if by asking someone else out you were in fact going to be spending less time with me or it was going to get harder to schedule time to hang out with you, then i needed to consider what i wanted to do. because i can't/refuse to control your actions, but i can try to control my own. i decided to check in with you about how much time we were spending together and how difficult it had gotten for us to schedule hang outs. i probably didn't figure all this out that snowy night in parc ex. it takes me awhile to figure things out and i don't like processing it all out loud with you. i don't want all my indecisiveness or undecidedness to become a part of our relationship. i have to make up my mind in my own head.

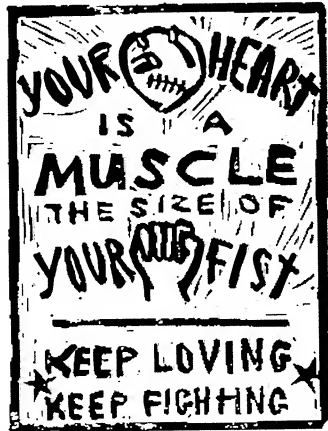
that fall you started working nights. five nights a week. 11:30pm to 6:30am. i was used to saving time for you at night but we started having sex in the middle of the day, which is awesome but it's also equaled more stress about scheduling time to hang out, which isn't so great. but we've talked about it. talking comes a bit easier now.

of sex and fairly regular hangouts. it didn't bother me that you were dating other people regularly and i wasn't. i knew it was something i was choosing to do. before you i had never asked someone out before and now i knew i could do it. not that it was easy, just that it was possible. so if i wanted to sleep with someone new all i had to do was ask and i decided not to ask for awhile because of lots of reasons like wanting time to myself and wanting time to spend with other people who are important to me.

around this time you were dating two people who weren't me and you were about to hit exams. you had a crush on someone new and were toying with the idea of asking them out. a friend and i had admitted to being into each other but extenuating circumstances were making it hard for us to actually hang out.

exam time turned out to be fucking hard. a lot of our hangouts involved you studying and me sitting around wishing you'd be done while at the same time not wanting to pressure you into studying less than you needed to. and you were stressed as hell and needed to talk about the stress when you weren't studying. which i think annoyed me because i felt like i was taking exams too even though i was just working part-time like i had been all year. but instead of saying that i told you i wanted us to schedule a time to do something special. something we could actually call a date. not a sleepover/hangout/stress session. but scheduling that date got tricky with all these new people in the picture.

there was a night that week where we went out together. we met up at a poetry reading and i was trying to pin you down for a date and you kept evading me. you were trying to schedule something with a new person you had just asked out. i was pissed, but in the moment couldn't articulate why.



A New Way of Doing This Shit. By Caytee

I can't remember any thought process that led me to the conclusion that I wanted to be in polayamorous relationships. I can remember feeling fucked up about the way I related to people I was in love with. Being uncomfortable with jealousy and possessive feelings, with dependency, with making other people responsible for my happiness or sadness. I had been hurt. I had hurt a lot of people. I had been in capital "L" love and it had hijacked my life for the better part of three years. I was looking for a new way of doing this shit.

And then you waltzed into my life.

I mean...you had already sort of been in my life, but more just waiting on the sidelines, hanging out in my periphery. This quiet girl who I couldn't really bring myself to talk to, 'cause I always assume that people who are quiet are quietly thinking that I am an idiot, and that I am not worth condescending to speak to.

But then one summer you started asking me to hang out one-on-one. You sat on my kitchen floor and I made you pancakes. You asked me a lot of questions. I like talking about myself, so answering them was easy and I just hoped that I wasn't coming off sounding stupid or anything. I was caught a little off-guard at your sudden interest in hanging out with me, but never suspected that there were any romantic or sexual intentions behind it.

Like I said, I was trying to figure this romance shit out, but the form that took was essentially just me bumbling around, fucking around, and fucking up. I was going on weird craigslist dates, having random hook-ups, and a lot of awkward, ambiguous hang-outs with people I wasn't sure I was dating and wasn't sure that I wanted to be dating. I had no idea what I

them through, without deciding what you wanted. and that scared me.

so i told you that i was feeling insecure/jealous/however the fuck you wanna label this situation. well, i talked it over with other people first because that's how i operate. and i realized we hadn't talked about how much time we wanted to spend together. i mean, we had a routine going and sometimes its not necessary to verbally agree on things, but i wanted that conversation to happen.

the talk turned into a talk about "primary partners" and we decided that wasn't what we were. that label was too possessive. too much like something someone could pull out of their back pocket later and use in an accusatory way to actually just say that the other person wasn't spending enough time with them. we negotiated a way to schedule hangouts. we agreed that we liked the amount of time we were spending together.

you called me out awhile later about zoning out while we were fucking. i think you actually told me that you were worried that i wasn't enjoying sex with you because i never said anything. and i knew i did that and i knew why but i'd never had someone else notice and ask me about it and force me to confront things head on. so i wrote you a story, sorta like this one but a little darker. it sped a little more out of control. and when you read the story you told me amazing things. like it wasn't all my fault and you were okay with taking some responsibility. and so we started talking more.

is this okay? can i keep going?

for awhile i hadn't done much dating. sure, i had seen someone on and off, i had slept with someone else, maybe made out with someone at a dance party. but there was never that combination

in high school i had thought that i would just know when i was in love with someone. and i made a distinction between being *in* love with someone and loving someone, with the former being way more important than the latter for a bunch of fucked up reasons that i'm not gonna tell you about here. somehow my heart would beat differently and my fingertips would be permanently tingly and i'd get butterflies in my stomach before seeing you or something. by the time i told you i loved you i had come to the conclusion that i get to decide whether or not i'm in love with someone. and i decided that telling you i loved you meant that i cared about you a lot, which i did. and also that i liked kissing you and eating food you'd made and getting you to tell me stories about your family and your hometown and growing up and such. so it wasn't so scary anymore and i told you i loved you too and it was okay. and i started telling other people i loved them and that was okay too.

we make out with who we want. we plan time for each other. we were seeing each other fairly often - maybe three nights a week or something. i kept leaving town so it was hard to tell, but when i would come back to town you would tell me how much you missed me and stuff and we would binge on each other until i left again.

then you started sleeping with a really close friend of yours. and when you told me i smiled at you and said "cool" or something nonchalant like that, but inside i was churning. i'm not sure why this time was different. it wasn't the first time you'd slept with a close friend since we started going out and it wasn't the first time you'd been regularly dating someone. maybe it was because i knew you'd had a crush on her for forever and you were acting unsure about the whole situation. it felt like you were just letting things happen without thinking

wanted and it all just made me slightly anxious and uncomfortable.

I ranted about all this to you one night. We were sitting by the train tracks on a grassy hill and the sun was setting and everything was all beautiful in that rusty, dirty, urban decay kind of way. I don't know if I can call it romantic, because I was completely oblivious to the fact that you were into me, but I can remember looking at the pink and red sky behind you and feeling like I was in some sort of quirky-cute indie movie. I think you said something along the lines of: "It's funny that you're mentioning all this because...I sort of have a crush on you".

I was floored. I stammered something about having to think about it, and we abandoned the subject for the rest of the evening. It was hard for me to think of someone I had known for a while in a totally different way, but when I actually considered the possibility of dating you it seemed like a fine idea. So I "asked you out", which seemed stupid because we had been hanging out already. I did it over the phone because I of course chickened out the night I had told myself I was going to do it. I don't really feel like that's when things actually started. I see things really starting after we had a long talk on my roof about relationships, break-ups, monogamy, and polyamory. I feel like that conversation set the tone for the way we've communicated throughout our relationship, being really honest and frank about things, and it felt really good.

I really have no idea what made polyamory seem like a good idea at the time. To be honest I think it mostly had to do with the fact that I was just kind of overwhelmed with romantic possibility, and didn't really know how anything was going to work out. I wasn't at all prepared to just dive into a monogamous relationship with someone I didn't know all that

well, and throw away this whole world of people I was just opening the door to.

So I threw myself into it. And all of a sudden it was like I had entered an alternate universe where everything I used to think about relationships just stopped making sense. Everything is pretty much the same, I just see it all in a completely different way.

One thing that looks a whole lot different now is possession. I don't want to possess anyone. It's as simple as that. In the past I had felt so conflicted about wanting to consume or possess someone that I loved. My love felt icky and tainted by this evil, possessive feeling. I even somehow managed to conflate the feeling of love with feelings of jealousy and possession. That's fucking gross. Wanting to own someone should not feel like anything even close to love.

Monogamy has stopped making sense now that I see it as an implicit agreement with someone to only have certain kinds of relationships with everyone else in your life. This basically means drawing boundaries all over someone else's life...boundaries that don't make much sense to me anymore. Just because someone doesn't have sex with anyone else doesn't mean they aren't going to be attracted to anyone else. Just because they don't label a relationship with someone in a certain way doesn't mean they aren't going to feel love for that person. It seems silly and arbitrary to draw lines in terms of physical affection. Hugging is ok, but not kissing? Cuddling is ok, but not sex? It seems even more impossible to draw lines in terms of love and feelings.

I had never been very good at drawing lines between the love I felt for my friends and the love I felt for people I was in romantic relationships with, even when I was inhabiting the

you kissed me right before i went home for my sister's graduation. you pulled my arm as i turned to walk out the door, kissed me and then sent me on my way. giddy. jumping up and down in the driveway while trying to unlock my bike. i didn't see you for another week and a half.

we started having sex with all our clothes on, which was great because i was too unsure about my body to share it with you without a few layers in between us.

you had been sleeping with someone else for awhile. an on and off sort of thing. i didn't ask. i didn't really care. i started seeing someone else once in awhile and you didn't ask either.

there are points where this narrative gets interrupted. points where i don't know what i want and tell you things that seem like they mean one thing but really mean another. points where you think i'm breaking up with you, but where all i really mean to say is that i'm scared as fuck about falling into an abyss and don't trust you enough yet to be one of the people who catches my sleeve and pulls me back to the edge. points where you call me crying on the phone and i don't know how to listen to you. so i smoke silently on the other end and murmur when it seems appropriate and then flood you with ideas and wait until you get angry enough before i realize that you don't want ideas. you just want me to listen.

so we had our first three-nights-in-a-row-hang-out. and you told me you loved me.

you were making out with two close friends and i was having traumatic sex with someone who didn't appreciate just how much i hate the cops. i told you i loved you back. but it took me two weeks to come around and spit it out. i had never said that to someone i was sleeping with before. I had never said that to anyone but my immediate family before.

open letters

you look at me every once in awhile and say that you can't believe things turned out this way. i can.

i told you i was into you last summer. we were sitting on a hill above the train tracks, knees facing the sky, feet dangling over the edge where the hill drops down to the tracks. sun setting at our backs. ridiculous romantic bullshit. and i was quizzing you about your ideas on food and politics. i was trying to figure out if you were into all that back to the land business. i'm only capable of loving cities.

i don't remember it that well, but you must have answered my questions in a way i liked because i awkwardly confessed to having a crush on you as we walked back towards the river.

you told me you weren't sure if you were into me. you had just got out of a rocky patch. you were sorting out your life. we arrived at my apartment and maybe you came inside for a bit and maybe we circled around the block again, but in any case, you were still deciding. i waited.

you called me a week later and we had coffee on your roof. the one where the squirrels ate all your plants and the raccoon came in through the window. we talked about relationships. when they start, what they mean, why they keep going, how they end.

-do whatever you want. i won't tell you what to do. i'll be honest about my intentions. i'll communicate to the best of my abilities.
-reading that in my head makes it sound like some sort of pledge.

universe where those lines were made to seem very important. I was perpetually "falling for" my friends in this way that could only ever end in reciprocation or heartbreak, because in that universe I was definitely not allowed to be "in love" with my friends, especially not if I happened to be interested in sleeping with them. But in this new alternate universe I don't need those lines, and it makes perfect, beautiful sense. I can just feel however I feel about people without worrying about the way our relationship is labeled. What really matters is defining that relationship for ourselves, not for other people. What that means is having conversations about what we want, and what we are willing to give.

Most of what I've learned about how this shit works is by just doing it. I didn't really feel like I knew that much about it and just pushed myself into it. I like to talk about it in terms of entering an alternate universe because of how quickly my old ways of thinking could come undone. Although I say that the way I used to understand relationships just "stopped making sense", there were definitely things in my old universe that never really made any sense to me. I started to enter this new universe when I started actively trying to undo the knots of my old universe in the places where things didn't make sense, and then at some point I think the whole thing just unravelled.

In this new universe I trust that people love me, care about me, want to spend time with me, and the fact that they also care, love, and spend time with other people in no way detracts from our relationship. The tricky part about this is that while love and caring are not necessarily quantifiable, time is. If I spend time with someone else, then that is less time that I can spend with you, right? So this is the part where I have to accept the boundaries of measurable time: hours, days, weeks. I need to reconcile how much time I actually have with how much time I would like to spend with people. This is something that has

fuck free love

taken a lot of fuck-ups for me to learn (and I'm still learning).

I've learned that I need to be straight up about how much time I want to spend with someone. I need to be specific about it. I would rather talk about how often we want to see each other and what we want out of our relationship than use labels like "primary partner" or someone I see "casually". Just because I'm not spending a huge amount of time with someone doesn't mean they don't deserve honesty, communication, and clear expectations for our relationship. This goes for friendships as well, and I would like to have way more conversations with my friends about our relationships and expectations. If in this universe I have friends that I'm in love with and lovers that I'm friends with, then why does one relationship deserve more care and attention than another? Why should we have these conversations with people that we fuck, but not with those that we don't? The people in my life that I don't have sex with aren't less important to me, so I don't want to treat them that way.

A funny thing about this new alternate universe is that it is very comically juxtaposed with the one that I used to live in...which sometimes makes it a whole lot more fun. I get that giddy, excited feeling that comes along with doing things you are not supposed to do. I've always really loved that feeling of just shrugging my shoulders, and shrugging away people's hang-ups and arbitrary rules about things. My big goofy smile asking "why not?" and daring people to tell me.

But this juxtaposition also comes along with a lot of funny looks, raised eyebrows, and a shit ton of questions. "How does it work?"

The answer changes depending on who's asking, or how they're asking. If it seems like they are just standing in their own universe, staring at me like some sort of oddity who clearly



Hey babe, how was your day?



Pretty good. Long day at work but then I dumpstered berries and made a smoothie. Yum!

Good. Work was ok. Also, I went on a date this afternoon.



How was your day?

Oh yeah? Cool!

Yeah! Can I tell you about it, or would that feel weird?

No, it's totally cool. But thanks for asking. There might be days when I don't feel like hearing tons of details about your dates. But it's ok now.



Cool. I should let you know that I'm also ok with you telling me about your dates, but I'm not comfortable with giving support about stuff that happens with your other lovers, you know?



doesn't understand the rules of how the world works, then maybe I'll just smile and let them think I'm some kind of "player" or "slut". (as far as labels go I'm pretty okay with the latter, but not really with the former). I'm not going to bother trying to convince them otherwise if they aren't willing to push themselves outside the boundaries of the way they think things work.

I can see that some people are curiously peering into this universe, some with their feet planted firmly in their own universe, and some letting a foot stray across the boundary between the two. For these people I'm a little more willing to try for a genuine understanding...but it's still pretty hard to explain "how it works". I think it's more useful to invite people into a different head space, ditch their assumptions about the way things work in their universe and try to see what things look like from where I'm standing.

If I'm willing to get into the nitty-gritty of it all with someone, the conversation always seems to end up on the topic of jealousy. I get it. It's sort of a big deal in most relationships. I could probably write pages and pages about it; it's something I have thought a lot about. But I don't really want to spend a ton of time talking about what makes this really hard. I would rather talk about why I want to do it, no matter how hard it is. Not in any self-sacrificing sort of way, but because I think that it's worth it. I wouldn't want to do things differently even if it would be easier.

So why is it worth it? Why is this the way I want to do things?

I want to do this because I want to challenge the frameworks that I am expected to base my relationships on: gender, marriage, the nuclear family. Hetero-monogamy is part of a narrative that I want no place in: the creation of an atomized

family unit, whose boundary delineates the space in which I am allowed to care for others, outside of which my relationships are dominated by fear and the logic of my own self-preservation. I want to create families that are based on intentionality, affinity, and support. I don't want a family based on a role that I was born into. I feel like the only way I can really break through my isolation is to build relationships on my own terms, with my own frameworks and beliefs.

I want to resist the commodification of my body by never considering myself the possessor of someone else's, and not needing my body to be given value only through its possession by others. I want to confront ideas of sexual objectification and ownership every time I feel them rise up within myself. Any moment that someone shares their body with me is precarious and fleeting, and that shared moment doesn't give me any say in what else that person wants to do with their body (unless it pertains to my own health and safety). I also don't want to make assumptions about what someone is willing to share today based on what they shared yesterday. I am never entitled to someone else's body.

I want to confront my insecurities for what they are, and not blame them on someone else's behaviour. This one is a toughie. It's tough because as much as I want to take responsibility for how I am feeling and not blame someone I'm dating for "making me jealous", taking on the entire burden of my own insecurities isn't really fair either. It's not fair to see myself as this broken, defective person, when there are a whole lot of people with a large stake in making sure I see myself that way (for example those with an interest in maintaining the current social/economic order which depends on everybody feeling helpless and worthless). Tackling these insecurities is a whole other story for me, but identifying where my feelings of

fuck feelings




fuck

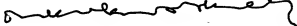
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spend with other people without being bound by reductive and oversimplified categories, milestones, and prescriptions. Do not be limited by the conventional and readily available narratives around how relationships can be and change. Be critical of monogamy! Be critical of polyamoury! And, more to my point, be critical of how a polyamoury vs monogamy framework misses way too much!



jealousy come from always leads me there. This is something that for me is worth doing not simply to be a less jealous lover, but to reclaim a sense of self-worth that I feel has been stolen from me by a world that wants me to hate myself into submission, apathy, or therapy.

Maybe I didn't have all these reasons for wanting to do this when I started, or maybe these ideas were just little seeds that needed the right conditions to grow, but at this point I am pretty damn sure why I am doing this.

This is what love means to me now. Every moment that this is hard is a moment that I am glad to be doing it. I used to say that I was glad because it was something I was doing *out of love*, but now it seems more like the only way for me *to* love. The only way I want to love.



fuck free love by Olivia

It's funny to see you wear winter boots because it doesn't seem right for such tiny feet to be so bolstered.

They look bigger but then I get the bright idea to try them on before you
Know it I'm stuck flapping around *can't somebody get these off me.*

Get me off.

Desperate in my yanking because it's cold outside and you need them.

And here I am
in love with the anxiety point,
to that voice which belongs to nobody *it's mine*
I erect
a battered display,
the noun a vehicle of amorous frenzy:
I'd let you cum anywhere.

In other words
my pronoun is informal
while you exist
to make my senseless melancholy
careless slip
and slope
and corresponding *subjects matter.*



conventional ideal. Evidence for this predetermined change is in the way we think about relationship milestones. Treating meeting a partner's family, moving in together, and marriage as significant events in and of themselves is a way of pushing relationships into the comfortable and normal path. People celebrate wedding anniversaries as a way of tracing their history along the prescribed lines. At ten years, you can look back to see all that you have accomplished together since your momentous marriage and look forward to 'the next ten'. Just as the blueprint is able to shift and account for change (limited and prescribed though it may be), there emerges a potential (a necessity) for coming up with our own, unique ways of setting goals and, more importantly, acknowledging and being okay with changing those goals as our relationships and lives change.

By either implicitly adopting the conventional blueprint or explicitly agreeing on the terms and structures of a relationship, we project into the future. Realistically, we need to accept that our wants, needs, expectations, and agreements are not going to last forever and be open to changing them when we want to and in ways that are not necessarily defined by some abstract ideal. Although this all seems kind of obvious, the implications are far reaching as space gets opened up to understand the emotionally laden "I'm in love with someone else" or "maybe we should spend less time together" as points to renegotiate a relationship, which might mean romantic separation but it might not.

Concluding...

In this critical context, re-imagining relationships means asking yourself what you want out of the time you

over who your partner can and cannot spend time with and how that time is spent; prioritizing your monogamous partner's feelings and well being over the feelings and well being of people with whom you have non-sexual relationships; centering your monogamous partner's needs and wants when planning for the future at the exclusion of taking other relationships into consideration. Whether monogamous or polyamorous, telling a partner that they cannot have a relationship or even that they have to have a certain kind of relationship with another person is an act of control and possession. Monogamy attracts these kinds of controlling demands particularly quickly. Because monogamy promises exclusive sexual access, a vicarious sense of entitlement emerges which guarantees both partners that their emotional needs will be met before anyone else's. By investing so much in one person, the prospect of the relationship ending becomes terrifying, motivating people to keep their relationships 'on track'. Because the stakes are so high, deviating from the track can be petrifying.

Regardless of promises and past agreements and often despite best efforts and intentions, people change. One way or another, this inevitable change is going to be reflected in the structure of our relationships. The conventional blueprint gives relationships one path as it traces love at first sight through marriage, to a nuclear family, and the happily ever after. When relationships do not move this way, they are considered unsuccessful and are supposed to result in a break up. For the blueprint path to make sense, the people involved in the relationship need to be working towards the same goal. Going from high school sweethearts to picking out burial plots doubtlessly requires substantial change in a relationship but the terms of the change are supposed to conform at every step to a

I pronounce indifference but I fuck free love because I love making love with *you love it too.*

So why would I want to fuck anyone but you.

Because inadequacy, as being towards already existing structures, *is relentless.*

I forget where to find you:
and you pretend I never saw it coming.

Inadequacy everywhere.



One Ring to Rule Them All: Impossible Promises and Pragmatic Politics by Liam

Think about that Hollywood moment when Joe Handsome gives Molly Doright his letterman jacket and she accepts his proposal to go steady...

...
...

...what just happened?

Saying 'yes' in this context means so much more than agreeing to see each other 'steadily'. At its most severe, going steady gets tied up with the tacit promise of a supposedly long-term and exclusive relationship where Joe and Molly can navigate a blueprint, building happy coupledom. By not explicitly defining what Joe means by going steady, the relationship passively slides onto tracks bound for 'a happy life together'. This slide can happen because we are all well trained in making assumptions about what the structures of a relationship are. These implied structures constitute an hetero-romantic relationship ideal which in turn translates into a minimum-level of commitment, sexual exclusivity, long-term investment, nuclear family building, and much more. The overarching ultimatum of living a relationship through un-discussed and rigid relationship conventions is that either the conventions are maintained (the expectations are consistently met, the blueprints are followed) or the relationship will end in, at the very least, a romantic separation—no more affectionate physical contact, no more intimate emotional support. If the relationship does not follow and match the blueprint, Joe and Molly are left with the choice of either getting things back on track or romantic separation. Those who do not want to choose

between the happily ever after and a life of romantic solitude, those who cannot or do not want to play out the blueprint, are pushed to find and create other ways of doing relationships.

Often, when rejecting the going steady blueprint we slip a little and end up rejecting monogamy. Once monogamy is unqualifiably bad, it is a pretty quick step to figure out that polyamoury is good: having a sexually exclusive romantic relationship means conforming to an archaic patriarchal and power laden script so, having an anti-patriarchal, politically conscious, and critical relationship means you should have more than one sexual partner. To be clear, I am not trying to rescue or defend monogamy. I am arguing that a preoccupation with a monogamy/polyamoury binary prevents a more useful and more critical analysis of the ends of the political potential for romantic relationships. The locus of the potential for relationships is not a reductive tally of the number of sexual partners a person can juggle at one time. The number of people a person manages to sleep with does not say all that much, however, more revealing are the questions of how relationships are structured, how relationships are political, how individual relationships are affected by norms and the capacity individual relationships have to shape new norms. Reducing relationship politics to a monogamy vs polyamoury manicheanism means dismissing other harmful norms and assumptions that are affecting us as un- or less important.

To get to the possibilities of re-imagining relationships, I want to start with my problems with conventional assumptions. Socially, we understand that there is a weight to committing to a monogamous relationship. Entering into an exclusive sexual partnership is surrounded by assumed promises: a commitment to spending at least some time together; a granting of control